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P 061000Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7737
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1261
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4801
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8349
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5911
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3794
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1725
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000461

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: POST NARGIS RELOCATIONS: EQUAL OPPORUNTITY ABUSE

REF: A. RANGOON 455

[1](#)B. BURMA IIR 6 812 0098 08 DTG 051226Z JUN 08

[1](#)C. RANGOON 453

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. A number of our Burmese and ethnic minority contacts told us that the government has pressured cyclone victims in unofficial relief camps to relocate to government-sanctioned camps or return to their villages. In other instances, local residents have pressured these internally displaced persons to return home. However, our contacts pointed out that these relocations did not appear to be targeted against any ethnic, religious, or racial group. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) NLD spokesman U Ohn Kyaing recently visited Bogalay and Labutta and reported that the regime and local residents had pressured many cyclone victims to leave unofficial shelters and return to their own villages. In Bogalay, he said that only one of thirteen unofficial relief shelters remained active. The shelter, located at the Thadan Ma Zawtikarama monastery, housed just 200 victims on June 1, down from over 800 in mid-May. The chief monk there told NLD officials that authorities had pressured him to send victims back to their villages, but said he had insisted the victims would not return until they were ready. A Bogalay resident recently told Poloff that local residents asked nearly 900 cyclone victims to leave a local monastery because they were concerned about deteriorating public health conditions (reftel A). A Burmese businessman told DAO friction between local residents and displaced cyclone victims may have been a factor in the decision to relocate some victims (reftel B).

[1](#)3. (C) In Labutta, seven monasteries housed approximately 15,000 victims in the weeks after the storm. Another 15,000 were housed at other unofficial shelters (reftel A). However, as of June 1, U Ohn Kyaing reported only about 2,000 remained in the monasteries. The rest had returned to their villages, were hiding in the area, or relocated to the official relief camps. According to U Ohn Kyaing, some of those who had left the unofficial shelters in Bogalay and Labutta had relocated voluntarily, while others departed in response to pressure from the regime and local residents. However, he stressed that the pressure to relocate was uniform and did not appear to be directed at any ethnic or religious group.

¶4. (C) Leading Karen figures Dr. Simon Tha and his wife Dr. Rebecca Htin have traveled to Bogalay and Labutta extensively since the storm and currently operate a mobile medical clinic near Bogalay. They confirmed that the regime pressured several hundred Karen storm victims to leave unofficial relief centers in Irrawaddy and Rangoon divisions over the past two weeks. According to Rebecca Htin, approximately 500 victims in Rangoon and 250 in and around Bogalay had been forced to leave the Baptist-run camps they had sought shelter in. However, they noted that government officials did not appear to have specifically targeted Karen Christians, but were pressuring all storm victims in unofficial camps to move on. Simon Tha pointed out that most Karen cyclone victims had chosen to seek shelter in Karen Baptist churches rather than from the government or non-Karen aid agencies. As a result, Simon Tha and Rebecca Htin thought many Karen might have been disproportionately affected by the regime's forced relocations from unofficial relief camps. There is a large ethnic Karen population in the affected delta region, many of whom were affected by the storm.

¶5. (C) Two officials from the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC) told poloff that last week authorities forced approximately 3,000 cyclone victims to leave an unofficial shelter set up at a bible school in Pathein. According to MCC Executive Secretary Saw George Shey and Associate General Secretary Reverend James Ngun Hlei, government officials told the storm victims to relocate from the Ko Tha Phyu school to a government-run camp nearby. They said that many of the victims subsequently left the government camps and returned

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to their villages, some by choice and others as a result of pressure from the regime. However, as with our other contacts, the MCC officials did not believe these victims had been targeted because of their religion or ethnicity and noted they had heard similar stories from the Buddhist and ethnic Burman communities. Christians are not always treated well by the regime, they lamented, but in this case the regime appeared to mistreat all cyclone victims equally.

¶6. (C) Comment. The relocation of storm victims has compounded the misery of cyclone victims caused by the regime's inept relief and recovery efforts. It does not, however, appear to be based on a discriminatory policy against any ethnic or religious groups.
VILLAROSA